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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0050  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0243  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TASHKENT 001579

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS  
AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO USOFFICE ALMATY  
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG  
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA  
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [UZ](#)  
SUBJECT: Uzbekistan: The Cotton Harvest in Jizzakh

REF: 09 TASHKENT 1567; 09 TASHKENT 1966

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CLASSIFIED BY: Holly Lindquist Thomas, P/E Officer, State, Tashkent;  
REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: On November 6, 2009, poloff met with human rights activists and a representative of the leading anti-trafficking NGO in Jizzakh, a city of roughly 150,000 people in a largely agricultural region about three hours southwest of Tashkent. Human rights activists spoke about several issues, focusing mainly on this year's cotton harvest. They stated that school children under 12 years old are not being forced to pick cotton in Jizzakh (although they sometimes participate at the behest of their families). Children over 12 have been mobilized, however, and are still in the fields picking cotton today. End summary.

Congratulations! Now Get Back to Work.

¶2. (SBU) President Karimov congratulated workers throughout the country last week for meeting the cotton quota for the year, but workers, including children, are still in the fields. Activists stated that the governors (hokims) in Jizzakh and other districts certified that they met the State Plan, but in reality, they have not yet done so. Students in many Jizzakh schools are expected to be in the fields until at least November 20, as they and other workers try to make the real numbers match the reported ones.

¶3. (C) Bakhtiyor Hamroev, Mamir Azimov, Ziyodullo Razzakov, Saida Kurbonova, Oktam Pardaev, and Oyazimhon Hidirova, all long-time rights activists, spoke with poloff for about two hours about child labor.

Students Sent to the Fields

14. (SBU) Activists reported that students from 9th grade (about 14 years old) forward were bussed or trucked out to the cotton fields in mid-September. Students brought their own food from home to supplement what is provided. Drinking water is hard to come by in the fields, and activists stated that some children resort to drinking from irrigation hoses, which do not supply potable water. The children are paid 72 soum (less than five cents) per kilogram, as compared to 85 soum for adults (about six cents), and while the quantity a person picks in a day can vary dramatically depending on the land and conditions, 40-50 kilograms per day seems to be about average, resulting in a daily wage of between two and three U.S. dollars. While schools continued normal operations for kids in the first through eighth grades, attendance in those grade levels was considerably reduced, as many families send their younger kids to the fields voluntarily either because they need the help to reach the quota quickly or because they need the money.

15. (SBU) Photographs taken this year show hundreds of students throwing sleeping bags and bedding into large piles as they prepare to board buses. The scene resembles one of kids preparing to go off to summer camp - excited to be getting out of school and, no doubt, to have the opportunity to socialize with members of the opposite sex. Other photographs show the kids picking cotton and passing large bags of raw cotton to be thrown on a truck. Poloff also personally observed young people working in

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the cotton fields directly off the main road to Jizzakh.

Meeting the Quota More Important than Lining the Pockets

16. (SBU) Early rains required farmers to replant the cotton fields last spring, and the cotton yields are expected to be less than normal as a result. Consequently, workers will have to get every last bit of cotton off the plants this year in order for each local subdivision to meet its quota under the State Plan. Local hokims and school administrators reportedly took bribes in the past from parents who did not want their children to participate in the harvest. Jizzakh activists stated that little of that is occurring this year in their district, as hokims are very concerned about meeting the quota, and as a result are focused on ensuring that every possible person is out in the fields.

All Hands on Deck

17. (U) Campaigns encouraging everyone to get out to the fields to do their part for the country are in full swing. A sign on the locked front gate to one of the markets in Jizzakh cheered workers on. (Meanwhile, people streamed in the unlocked side entrance.) State employees are transferred to the fields (something undoubtedly not in their job descriptions), and private business owners are being asked to send some of their employees to the fields or to hire day laborers in their places. Threats, implied or explicit, often accompany these requests. Activists Pardaev and Hidirova stated that people accepting social payments were required to pick cotton before they could receive their payments this fall, particularly mentioning cases of new mothers having their payments withheld unless they worked the fields. (Mothers with children under two are eligible for benefits.)

18. (SBU) While Post had heard some reports that parents and teachers refusing to send kids were suffering fewer repercussions this year, that does not appear to be the case in Jizzakh. Activist Azimov stated that he personally saw a letter from the Jizzakh Prosecutor's Office to a school principal, threatening criminal charges against the principal if he didn't ensure that all the kids in his school participated in the harvest. While students and adults could sometimes get medical waivers in the past, this year those waivers are hard to come by. One activist reported that she had been trying secure a waiver for a student who suffered an allergic reaction in the fields that resulted in blisters all over her face and hands. At the hospital, the doctor refused to certify that the child could not participate for medical reasons, stating that the regional health department had forbidden doctors from making such statements this year. When the activist appealed to the overseeing doctor, he agreed to certify the medical condition, but the school then would not accept the report, saying that all medical waivers had to be approved by a particular clinic. After finally jumping through all the necessary hoops to secure the medical waiver, the school agreed not to send the student to the fields, but then expelled her because she did not fulfill her duty.

19. (SBU) Poloff had planned to visit a museum in Jizzakh before heading back to Tashkent, but the Deputy Director urged us to reschedule: "Everyone's out picking cotton." she explained.

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Greater Jizzakh

110. (C) A couple of days before poloff's visit to Jizzakh, three activists from the outer areas of the Jizzakh district (whose area is more than 8,000 square miles) discussed child labor with poloff. Berdieva Gavakhar, Nuriya Imomkulova, and Mukhabbat Khasanova reported that students in the eighth and ninth grades in their areas were bussed on September 23 to cotton fields 60 to 70 kilometers away. They worked from 7am to 6pm, with a one hour break for lunch, and were given inadequate supplies of food and drinking water. They slept in barracks with bunk beds, without any division between girls and boys. The children were not paid, as the deductions taken for food and lodging exceeded any amount they might have earned. The children were returned to their homes on November 2, as the harvest in that part of the region was complete.

111. (SBU) Early in the harvest season, these activists applied for a permit to protest child labor in their region, but their application was denied. In spite of the denial, they staged a small picket line on October 5. Law enforcement quickly shut it down and brought the five participants to the police station. The activists were not charged with criminal charges, but they were warned that if it happened again, they would receive 15-day jail sentences. One officer "warned" them to be careful, as a blow from behind could happen to any of them at any time. Two of the three women, Gavakhar and Imomkulova, have both suffered blows from unknown assailants in the past.

Comment

112. (C) The fact that younger children are not being sent to the fields this year is certainly a positive development. At least in Jizzakh, however, the state continues to facilitate child labor, closing the schools and bussing kids to areas where they are needed. Whether local leaders or the central government is behind those actions is not clear, but the situation in Jizzakh illustrates that this system of using child labor - a legacy of the Soviet era - remains strongly in place (see reftels).

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